

# Learning in the 21st Century: Parents' Perspectives, Parents' Priorities



Blackboard K-12



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2009 Project Tomorrow® released its **Speak Up 2008 Selected National Findings** which highlighted that America's K-12 students have become a powerful "Digital Advance Team" who are forging new paths for effectively leveraging emerging technologies for teaching and learning. Our K-12 students are the early adopters. And they're remarkably adept at adapting new technologies and creating new ways to use technology products to meet a dizzying array of personal, social and educational needs. Their parents and their teachers learn from them—and the technologies the students use personally outside of school are finding their way into their approach to learning.

Through the Speak Up 2008 Survey, students' offered poignant recommendations for using technology to transform their school experiences. First they want learning to move with them, wherever they are. They want to be untethered and use their mobile devices to extend learning beyond the classroom. And on a related note, they see great value in creating and participating in new interactive, inclusive learning spaces, where online classes and tutors, simulations, games and virtual reality are all part of their learning experiences. Students also want Web 2.0 tools to be part of their learning lives, because these are the tools that enable them to connect, collaborate, create, and engage in learning that is relevant, contextual and experiential.

This report examines specifically the parents' responses to the aspirations of K-12 students for technology-enhanced learning environments. The parent data was collected during Speak Up 2008 and provides additional insight into technology's role in improving students' educational experiences and opportunities. Key highlights:

- **Parents and students agree that schools are not preparing students for the 21st century.** Only a third of the parents responding to the survey believed that schools were doing a good job of preparing students for the 21st century. That directly correlates with students' opinions...only 40 percent of 6th-12th grade students thought their schools were preparing them adequately for the challenges ahead. In contrast, more than half of the principals who responded to the survey believe they are doing a good job of preparing students. The gap is significant.
- **Parents want more technology in their child's school.** Parent responses point out that they are notably dissatisfied with the availability of quality technology in schools and teachers' skills in using technology. They want schools to do a better job of integrating technology throughout the learning environment and their children's learning experiences.
- **Parents agree with students that using technology is essential for learning.** Parents support their children's use of technology and have stated it emphatically. From their vantage points, effective technology implementation in schools is essential to student success. They believe that teachers need more training and more access to up-to-date technology. They're open to and in many cases, strongly in favor of schools adopting 21st century technology-infused approaches to teaching and learning...ranging from online textbooks to more use of tools such as interactive white boards, laptops for students, computer projection devices and technology-based organizational tools. Just 34 percent of the study's parent responders agreed that the technology skills their children were learning were acceptable.
- **Parents and students approach the use of technology differently.** While parents and students agree on many aspects regarding the use of technology in education, there continues to be a significant "digital disconnect" between the digitally native students and their digitally immigrant parents. Over the past six years, the Speak Up data has revealed a similar "digital disconnect" between students and teachers. Students want schools to offer more tech tools and resources such as mobile devices, simulations and games, collaboration tools (e.g. blogs, and wikis) than their parents do. Yet, parents' aspirations and values about technology mimic those of their children when discussing technology tools which have a more traditional education basis such as online textbooks, interactive whiteboards and tools to help with self-organization.

- **Parents believe that information literacy is crucial to their children's success.** Success in the 21st century will depend on their children's ability to conduct research, find, organize, and summarize data and develop media literacy skills and to a large extent, students agree with them, though not quite at the same level. Students in grades 6th-12th were more likely to believe that they will learn critical media literacy skills on their own by using technology (40 percent) while parents (68 percent) believe that students will develop skills by using technology as part of their regular classes.

Increasingly, schools and districts nationwide are realizing the importance and value of including parents and their voices in local discussions about how to prepare today's students for the jobs and careers of the future. As the schools and districts refine technology plans to accommodate emerging technologies and evaluate new investment strategies to create 21st century learning environments, the perspectives of education's stakeholders, including parents and students, are more important than ever. The Speak Up data empowers these key constituencies to share their voices and have a meaningful impact on the future of education.

## Speak Up Survey Methods

This report recaps the parents' responses from Project Tomorrow's Speak Up 2008 Survey, informing international discussions about how to create 21st century classrooms that engage today's "digital native" students. Project Tomorrow collected survey responses from more than 21,000 parents of K-12 students, from schools and communities in all 50 states. Their opinions, as summarized here, are used to influence policy and practice in their children's schools, their communities, and at the polls, in state and national elections. The voices of parents matter because their support of 21st century schools and in particular, educational technology, is critical as we discuss new ways to leverage education to drive American competitiveness.

In 2008, Project Tomorrow surveyed 21,309 parents, 281,150 K-12 students, 29,644 teachers, and 3,115 administrators representing 4,379 schools and 868 districts representing public (95 percent), private (3 percent), and virtual schools (2 percent). Schools were located in urban (35 percent), suburban (32 percent) and rural (33 percent) communities. Forty-five percent of the schools were Title I eligible (an indicator of student population poverty) and 34 percent of the participating schools had more than 50 percent minority population attending.

The Speak Up 2008 Survey was administered online between October 15th and December 21st, 2008. The survey included foundation questions about technology use, 21st century skills and schools of the future, as well as emerging technologies (online learning, mobile devices and digital content), science instruction and global competitiveness, and the challenges faced by administrators. The survey was a convenience sample. Every school and district in the United States was eligible to participate in the research project. School and district staff members encouraged and facilitated participation in the online Speak Up Surveys. To minimize bias in the survey results, significant outreach was done to ensure adequate regional, socio-economic and racial/ethnic/cultural distribution. To participate in Speak Up, districts registered their schools, promoted the survey to

Just 34 percent of the study's parent responders agreed that the technology skills their children were learning were acceptable and just under one-third thought that schools were doing a good job of preparing students for the jobs of the 21st century.



their constituents and scheduled time for their students and staff to take the 15-minute online survey. In February 2009, participating schools and districts had free, online access to their stakeholder data with comparative national benchmarks.

The national data was summarized, analyzed and subsequently verified through a series of focus groups and interviews with representative groups of students, educators and parents. Data findings were analyzed to compare responses between parents whose children attended schools qualifying for Title I funds and parents whose children attended non-Title I funded schools. The differences between the responses were negligible and refuted the notion that parents from lower income neighborhoods are less tech savvy and less demanding with regard to the use of technology to deliver enhanced learning opportunities in their local schools.

Over one-half of the parents noted they use (or would like to use) the Internet to tap into information about their children's education through the school's website or portal.



Since fall 2003, the annual Speak Up Survey has collected and reported on the views of more than 1.5 million K-12 students, educators and parents representing over 18,000 schools in all 50 states. The Speak Up data represents the *largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder* input on education, technology, 21st century skills, schools of the futures and science instruction.

### *Parents are techies too*

Parents who participated in the Speak Up survey were engaged technology users who reported they had access to desktop and laptop computers, cell phones, music and multi-media devices and video game systems. About one-third of the parents reported they had smart phones with Internet access. More than half of the parents self-reported they had average technology skills and more than a third labeled their skills as advanced compared to other parents.

While both parents and students used Web based tools such as email, instant messaging and text messaging to communicate and share information, students outpaced parents in the use of emerging Web 2.0 tools to work collaboratively and create new materials. Communications tools such as email, instant messaging and text messaging were used by both parents (69 percent) and 6th-12th grade students (46%). Similarly parents and 6th-12th grade students used web tools to access and share videos, podcasts and photos (41 percent vs. 38 percent), update their profiles on social networks (27 percent vs. 40 percent), and communicate through discussion boards, chat forums or social networking sites (24 percent vs. 25 percent). Parents (37 percent) were more likely than 6th-12th grade students to use web tools to notify them about things they are interested in; while 6th-12th grade students were more likely to create new content or use tools to work collaboratively with others.

Over one-half of the parents noted they use (or would like to use) the Internet to tap into information about their children's education through the school's website or portal. Interestingly, this was the highest ranked preferred use of current or desired high-speed Internet access...again emphasizing parents' interest in and commitment to their children's educational experiences and opportunities. It stands to reason that nearly half (47 percent) agreed that providing affordable high-speed Internet access to homes, businesses and schools should by 2010 should be a national priority.

## Parents, Students and Educators - On Different Pages

**“Integrate technology tools in all core class instruction. Make online textbooks available. Offer online tutorials for students having difficulties understanding what is being taught in the classroom. Remember every student’s learning process is different.”**

*Parent - Viera, FL*

**“Have a smart board in every room. Provide students with laptops so all children have access to computers. Give the teachers the tools to utilize the technology available in the world today - document cameras, smart boards, white boards, electronic clickers.”**

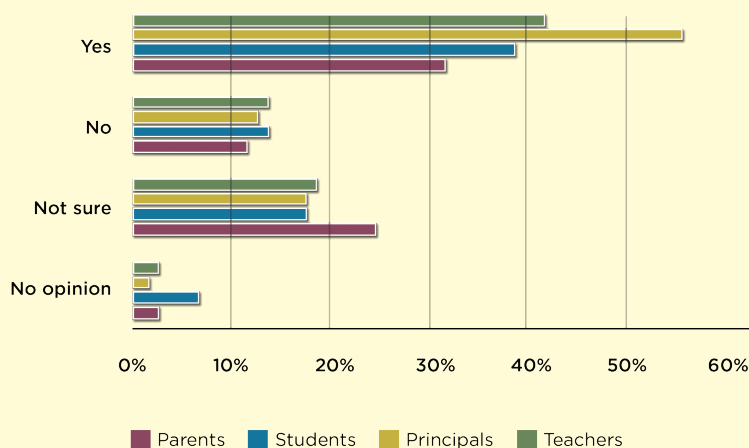
*Parent - Springfield, PA*

About one third of the parents responding to the 2008 Speak Up survey indicated that their child’s school was doing a good job of preparing students for the jobs of the 21st century, with 12 percent answering no, schools were not performing satisfactorily and 28 percent indicating they simply weren’t sure or had no opinion [Figure 1]. When compared to data from the 2007 survey, fewer parents were satisfied with their child’s school in 2008. Interestingly, more than half of all school principals (56 percent) stated that their schools were indeed preparing students well for 21st century jobs. In their assessment of the effectiveness of their school in preparing students for jobs of the 21st century, students and parents were on the same page and the contrast with the viewpoint of the school principal was striking.

On balance, parents supported students’ desire to use technology more robustly as part of their learning lives. When it comes to schools’ use of technology for instruction, parents and educators seem to be more aligned. When asked about the importance of effective technology implementation as it relates to student success, 78 percent of the parent responders believed that this is important. Parents’ opinions mirrored those of school principals who reported that effective use of technology within instruction is important or very important (85 percent). Teachers were in step with parents as well, with 70 percent responding that technology impacts student success.

But while parents, principals, and teachers told us technology is important for success, parents’ levels of satisfaction with specific technology uses in schools painted another picture. Project Tomorrow asked parents how satisfied they were with the use of technology at their children’s school. Almost one-half

**Figure 1: Are schools doing a good job preparing students for the 21st century?**



were satisfied with Internet safety and privacy of personal information; however, nearly 80 percent did not think that students spent enough time using technology. Their responses uncovered a noticeable lack of enthusiasm or understanding about the ways in which technology was implemented in the classroom:

- Only 35 percent found the amount of technology available for student use to be acceptable and only 33 percent thought that the use of technology for academic purposes was acceptable;
- 26 percent rated the quality of hardware and software as acceptable;
- Just 25 percent thought that schools placed the appropriate priority on technology;
- When it comes to teachers' skills in using technology and the technology skills students were learning, approximately one-third of the parents found those to be acceptable;
- 20 percent did not know what technology was available at their children's school.

Parents were dissatisfied as reflected in the data above and their students were dissatisfied as well. Parental perceptions may be influenced by what they hear from their children and thus, reflected in parents' responses. Students in 6th-12th grades pinpointed these points of frustration:

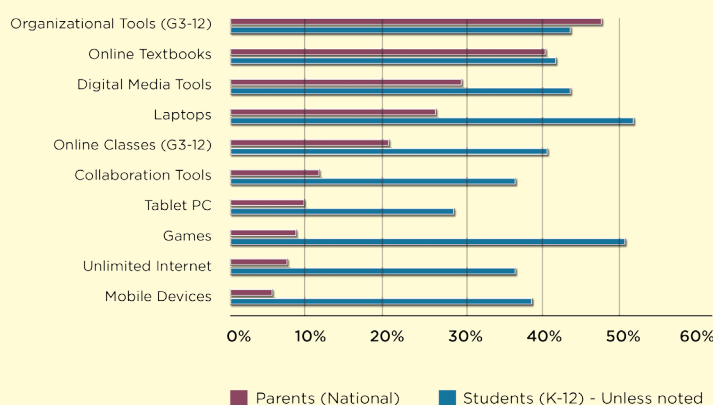
- 31 percent of the students responded that not being able to use their own computers or mobile devices was a barrier to learning;
- 11 percent stated that computers and other tech equipment simply was not available to them or the software is not good enough (14%);
- 35 percent stated that teachers were limiting their use of technology;
- 43 percent stated that school filters or firewalls blocked the websites they needed to use for assignments.

## Parents Envision Improvement

So if parents were less than enthusiastic about the ways schools are currently harnessing the power of technology, what did they think would improve the situation? Like their students, parents supported creating technology-rich environments for students and their responses indicated that they believed that teacher training and appropriate tools for teachers are important parts of the equation. First and foremost, they wanted their children to receive training about how to use technology for schoolwork (42 percent). Next, parents thought that classroom teachers should receive training about how best to integrate technology into instruction (41 percent) and the tools should be integrated into daily instruction (34 percent). Then, parents wanted schools to have enough technology for all students to use (38 percent) and that the products are current and high quality (33 percent).

Clearly, parents want their children's teachers to be tech-savvy and well equipped. And while technology access was important to parents, they did not feel as strongly about providing wireless Internet access around the school campus (14 percent) or having students bring their own technology devices to school for learning

**Figure 2: Parents & Students Speak Up about using Technology to Personalize Learning**

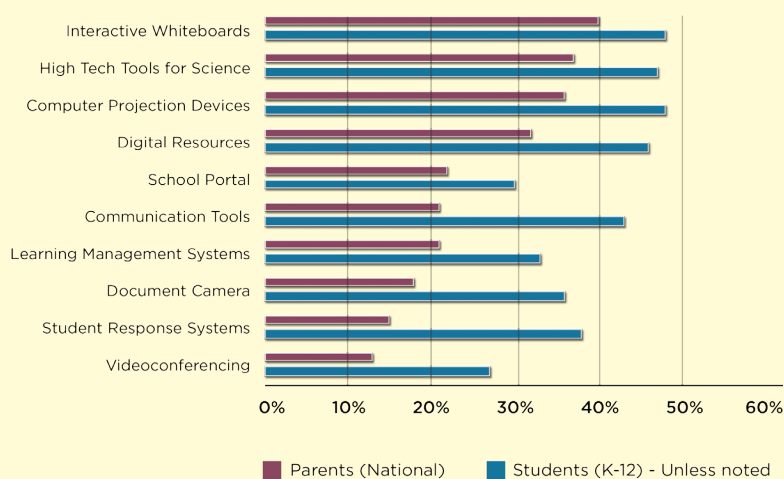


(9 percent). However, as seen in the data about using mobile learning devices such as smart phones and PDAs in instruction, parents saw the benefits, including improved communications and increased student engagement in school and learning. Of the parents who wanted students to use mobile devices within learning, 63 percent believed that this would increase student engagement. This same subset of parents (61 percent) believed that the use of mobile devices would prepare students for the world of work. More than half of these mobile-minded parents indicated that mobile devices would extend learning beyond the school day and had the potential to improve communication among teachers, students and parents. This underscores an opportunity for school leaders to showcase concrete examples of the ways in which mobile devices can positively impact instruction and learning.

Parents wanted schools to do a better job of infusing technology throughout the learning environment and their children's learning experiences. And yes, they had specific ideas about how schools should invest in technology to enhance student achievement. *Figure 2* compares parents' and students' priorities in the purchase and application of technology tools that can be used to deliver a more personalized learning experience. In the use of technology tools and resources that are more traditional, parents' and students' priorities differed, as *Figure 3* indicates.



**Figure 3: Parents & Students Speak Up about Preferred Technology for Classrooms**



How did parents' technology priorities align with students? Not surprisingly, students placed higher priorities on technologies that personalized learning including games (a difference of 42 percent), mobile devices (a difference of 37 percent), unlimited Internet (a difference of 32 percent), and online classes (a difference of 20 percent) than did parents. Students continued to report that they were unable to fully realize the power or the benefits of using technology tools at school during the school day. Students were frustrated by the lack of time at school to use technology, school filters or firewalls which block access to websites they need and by teachers and rules that limit their use of technology. Clearly while parents may not think of digital gaming and mobile devices as necessary instructional tools, they did see the need to give students access to more and better tools...and they believed that teachers' roles are critical in helping students use technology successfully for success in school.

### Going Mobile

When Project Tomorrow asked parents, teachers and principals about the potential benefits of integrating mobile devices such as smart phones, PDAs or MP3 players into instruction, parents perceived three primary benefits. For parents, mostly highly rated (31 percent) was increasing student engagement in school and

learning. Next were preparing students for the world of work (29 percent) and improving communications among teachers, parents and students (27 percent). Parents were also warming to mobile devices' abilities to personalize instruction, and help students develop and strengthen their skills in collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving. Parents understand that mobile devices may have the potential to help students who are struggling and to extend learning beyond the school day.

Notably, principals had higher expectations about how mobile devices can deliver instructional advantages. Over three-fourths of the responding principals indicated that they believe student engagement will increase when these devices are used for teaching and learning. Teachers were more in synch with principals as well with nearly half (46 percent) agreeing that student engagement could be a primary benefit. Parents' and educators' understanding of the potential benefits of mobile technology for learning paves the way for greater acceptance of students' desires to be untethered from traditional desktop technology, so they can learn, collaborate, create, and contribute in the ways that are most productive and powerful for them.

**“EVERY teacher should be using technology, email and other electronic avenues for research, homework and communications.”**

*Parent - Manchester, NH*



The mobile device issue has larger implications for parents. Because parents may not yet use mobile devices in the same way students do, they might not understand potential applications for learning. Further, parents may not fully comprehend students' deep desires for untethered, ubiquitous access. Once parents have more personal context for the ways in which these devices can be used, they may become more comfortable with students assuming additional control of their own learning.

Project Tomorrow asked parents about their concerns regarding their children's Internet use. More than half of the survey's respondents indicated that online predators, meeting strangers online, and sharing too much information were significant concerns, followed closely by violent or inappropriate content, advertising and spam and worries about children simply spending too much time on computer. While all of these concerns are certainly valid, it's important to note that only 32 percent of the parents responding used smart phones that provided Internet access. As parents become more familiar and comfortable with these devices, their responses to this question may change over time.

### *Using Technology to Transform the Learning Experience: Parents and Students Share Ideas*

The Speak Up data continues to reveal that students typically “power down” their personal technology when they arrive at school. For these 21st century learners, limiting their access to technology means taking away an important part of the toolkit they use to participate in the world around them. So when they are forced to “power down” at school, they are working without the tools they're most comfortable with, the tools that help them organize their thinking, conduct research, collaborate, and create content. It's analogous to asking them to write, without a pencil.

Like their children, parents envision a richer technology-infused learning environment for their students - one in which students have laptops, online and digital learning resources, and high tech tools and equipment to support learning.

## *The Needs and Desires of Free Agent Learners*

When asked how their schools could make it easier for them to work electronically, students' number one response was "...let me use my own devices and tools in the school day." Students are becoming free agent learners, seeking control of their own education. Part of that transformation comes from a growing array of new learning resources and materials. Students have definite ideas about how technology can transform their school experiences, including the development of participatory, interactive learning spaces and better integration of Web 2.0 tools that give them the opportunity to work collaboratively and be content creators. What's more, they want expanded digital resources and new media in the classroom to add relevance and context. They're enthusiastic about getting beyond classroom walls to make learning experiential so they can use authentic tools and resources, such as high-tech science instrumentation or work with content experts to develop projects.

However, as students pursue free agent learning, it's critically important that they learn how to navigate through the oceans of data available to them, so they make wise choices. Here the skills of data gathering, analysis, synthesis and forming sound, reasoned ideas become more important than ever. When asked about the most important information and media literacy skills students must develop for 21st century success, parents had some clear opinions about what's needed. Nearly two-thirds of the parents cited students' abilities to conduct research, prepare written or verbal research reports and organize information. Next on parents' radar screens were students' skills in summarizing research, using technology and digital content responsibly and their ability to think critically about the relevance, authenticity and credibility of the resources they use. And parents were abundantly clear about the best ways for children to acquire these skills. Nearly three-fourths (68 percent) responded that students should gain these skills by using technology as part of their regular classes. Only 16 percent thought that students could learn the skills from them...underscoring the need for schools to take on this critical responsibility. Students by and large agreed with their parents, however, 41 percent of the high school students believed that they could learn information and media literacy skills on their own, simply by using technology.

## *Online Textbooks: Parents See the Benefits*

Parents are beginning to share the excitement over the potential of new digital learning opportunities. The survey posed the question, "Imagine you can design a new kind of textbook for your child that will be 100% online. What should be included in that new online textbook to help your child learn?" Highest on parents' priority lists were the ability to make electronic notes and highlights, quizzes and tests that students can take on their own, anytime access to online tutors, links to helpful websites, and animations and simulations that explain concepts. Parents also indicated that links to real-time data, advanced topics for acceleration, and self-paced tutorials would make online textbooks productive for learning. Parents' vision for the richness of online textbooks aligns with their views that online textbooks and organizational tools are good investments to enhance student achievement. Only 5% of parents nationwide chose the option, "I don't think online textbooks are a good idea."



"Get rid of textbooks because they are too heavy to carry around. Make them available online instead. Have chat groups available for classmates to go to to discuss homework or tests. Make using hand-held note-taking devices or electronic organizers available."

*Parent - Ladera Ranch, CA*

It's critical for educators to continue to explain and reinforce how they are developing and implementing instructional strategies that will indeed prepare students for 21st century challenges and success.



## *21st Century Learning: New Skills and New Approaches Ahead*

When it comes to redesigning schools so they better fit the needs of 21st century students, parents have a wealth of ideas. Project Tomorrow asked “What are 3 tangible things that you think your school should do in the next year to create a world class 21st century classroom for your children?” The survey asked them what they might do as parents to help schools achieve this vision. Parents’ answers spoke volumes and directly supported students’ ideas about their desires for personalized learning, using 21st century skills and tools, and having opportunities to engage in relevant learning experiences.

**“The world of today involves much work done on computers and the Internet is an essential part of our productivity. The new schools of today should show students to use programs for the different careers available today.”** *Parent - Orlando, FL*

**“Create a technological environment where each student could work at his/her learning pace with appropriate learning materials and resources available.”** *Parent - Annandale, VA*

**“Technology will always be changing, so the most important thing that schools can do is to teach critical thinking in all subjects, and hold students to high standards. This will make it more likely that students will become lifelong learners.”** *Parent - Lake Orion, MI*

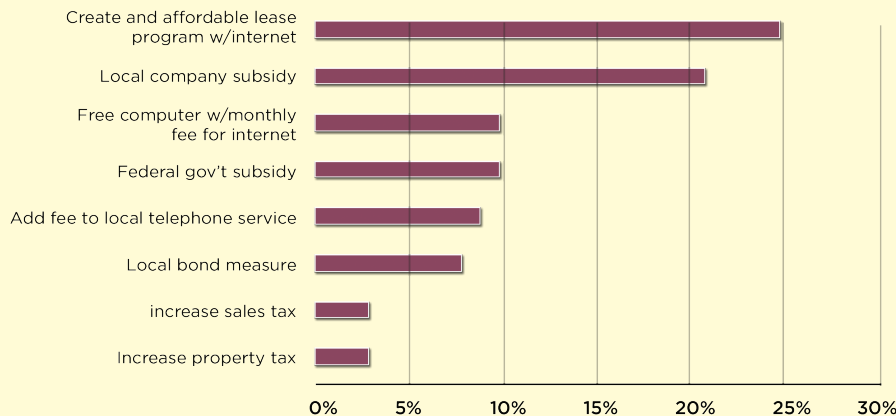
**“Review current trends in jobs and technology and adjust teaching goals to help [students] both understand the world around them and understand the evolution of technology and how students will need to adapt in years to come.”** *Parent - Conyers, GA*

**“...more computer facilities so each child has access when they need it; better trained teachers in the use of computer resources (including parent communications tools) so that they can support the student’s efforts.”** *Parent - Dana Point, CA*

From their responses, it appears that parents are ready and willing to roll up their sleeves and participate. Their responses indicated that they would be willing to volunteer in computer labs, help train teachers in using common computer applications and spend time in classrooms sharing their own experiences in their jobs and professions.

Parents also understand the importance of adequate bandwidth to address the needs of 21st century schools and students. Parents noted that they were, in majority (70 percent) satisfied with their access to the Internet at home. Only 3 percent cited issues of affordability for computers or Internet access as barriers. And 72 percent reported that their children used their home computers for education-related purposes between 1 and 10 hours per week. The survey posed the questions, “If you were working on a committee to provide every student with a computer and affordable, high speed Internet access, what recommendations would you make for financing the project?” Affordable leasing programs garnered the highest response (25 percent) followed closely by subsidies from local companies (21 percent). Smaller numbers of responses supported the ideas of increases in taxes, adding fees to local telephone service, or having federal or state governmental agencies pay.

**Figure 4: Parent's Recommendations for Financing Computers and Affordable High-Speed Internet Access**



©2009, Project Tomorrow

## Parents' Perspectives, Parents' Priorities

Parents have stated it emphatically. From their vantage points, effective technology implementation in schools is essential to student success. They believe that teachers need more training and more access to up-to-date technology. They're open to and in many cases, strongly in favor of schools adopting 21st century technology-infused approaches to teaching and learning...ranging from online textbooks to more use of tools such as interactive white boards, laptops for students, computer projection devices and technology-based organizational tools. Just 34 percent of the study's parent responders agreed that the technology skills their children were learning were acceptable and just under one-third thought that schools were doing a good job of preparing students for the jobs of the 21st century.

All this information points out that parents are "on board" with their children's desires and needs for a 21st century learning environment even though their ideas about specific technology uses and applications may differ. As educators talk to parents to build support, learn about their dreams and goals for their children and to invite them into their learning communities, it's critical to remember that parents are experiencing the value and potential of technology in their own lives and they see great potential ahead when their children can use technology to learn and succeed in school and beyond. What's more, they're already

using technology in growing numbers to communicate with teachers, monitor their student's assignments and progress, and become more aware and involved in school activities. They're eager to help, to share their experiences, and to support initiatives that will make technology available and productive for their children. It's critical for educators to continue to explain and reinforce how they are developing and implementing instructional strategies that will indeed prepare students for 21st century challenges and success.

**"Encourage more incorporation of technology into everyday classroom use in every course area. Technology should not be used only as a messaging system. It can be used as a writing instrument and a research tool."**

*Parent - Baton Rouge, LA*

*For the full series of Education in the 21st Century reports by Blackboard and Project Tomorrow, please visit [www.blackboard.com/k12/education21c](http://www.blackboard.com/k12/education21c).*

## About Project Tomorrow®

Speak Up is a national initiative of Project Tomorrow, the nation's leading education nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that today's students are well prepared to be tomorrow's innovators, leaders and engaged citizens. Since fall 2003, the annual Speak Up project has collected and reported on the views of over 1.5 million K-12 students, teachers, administrators and parents representing over 18,000 schools in all 50 states. The Speak Up data represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder input on education, technology, 21st century skills, schools of the future and science instruction. Education, business and policy leaders report using the data regularly to inform federal, state and local education programs. For additional information, visit [www.tomorrow.org](http://www.tomorrow.org).

## About Blackboard Inc.

Blackboard Inc. is a global leader in education technology that transforms the experience of millions of students and teachers every day. Blackboard solutions empower K-12 schools and districts to focus on personalized teaching and learning regardless of time, place or situation. Schools use Blackboard technology to modernize the way they connect teachers, parents and students in the educational process, increasing engagement for the entire school community. With Blackboard solutions, educators are closing the gap between the way students live and the way they learn through personalized, connected learning experiences and communications. Visit [www.blackboard.com/k12](http://www.blackboard.com/k12) for more information.

## Blackboard® K-12

650 Massachusetts Avenue, NW 6th Floor  
Washington, DC 20001  
1-800-424-9299, ext. 2427  
[www.blackboard.com/k12](http://www.blackboard.com/k12)

15707 Rockfield Blvd  
Suite 330  
Irvine, CA 92618  
949 609-4660 ext 17  
[www.tomorrow.org](http://www.tomorrow.org)

